

Why Turf?

The carefully groomed fields used by today's field hockey and women's lacrosse teams were only a dream in the late 1970s. At that time, we played on a field behind Tustin Gymnasium, where the Gateways stand today. The field size was bound by a monument at one end and the railroad tracks on the side. When the West Fields across Route 15 were developed, there was more space, but the quality of the grass left a lot to be desired. It is not easy to "push" a hockey ball on a surface dominated by clumps of crabgrass, rocks, and ruts.

Thanks to the careful attention of the coaches and physical plant staff, today's grass playing fields are about as good as they can possibly be as long as the weather cooperates. But I'm sure you remember why the grass at Bucknell is so green in the spring. The weather does *not* often cooperate, and with the first lacrosse game coming just as the snow melts, the grass fields are simply not in playing condition for much of the spring season. While practicing in the field house is an alternative, the lighting does not replicate an outdoor atmosphere, and the bounce of the ball is nothing like the real thing outside. The ideal solution is an outdoor turf field, one that has the feel of real grass, without the vulnerability.

While I have fond memories of playing field hockey and lacrosse in the mud, I realize that the times have changed. Bucknell has made great strides in field improvement since the 1970s, and now we need to take advantage of the technology to provide our field hockey and women's lacrosse teams with an all-weather, year-round turf field. Let's give our teams every advantage so that they can remain competitive in the Patriot League!

Karin (Wegener) Knisely '79

Why Turf?

I cannot think about Bucknell without thinking about women's lacrosse. As player from 1987-90, then as a grad assistant from 1991-93, life revolved around walking to and from the gym; dodging cars as we crossed Route 15 to and from the field; 6 a.m. workouts in preseason; going to games in crowded vans; the camaraderie; the jokes; and, of course, the competition.

Back then, as a woman athlete before the explosion in women's sports, we knew not to expect much. Even though we were supported financially to the point where we had equipment and got to and from games, we knew that it was the men's sports, basketball, football mostly, that were the most "important." This feeling came not only from the university and athletic department, but also from alumni, whose dollar contributions only served to underscore what we knew to be true.

It is time that the alumni make a concerted effort to change the pattern of contribution. The field hockey and lacrosse programs need a turf field. Enough of the frozen, bumpy tundra; of the turned ankles; of the mud puddles; of being at a disadvantage when playing on opponents' all-weather turf fields. However, this will only happen with

the contributions of alumni. The women athletes should no longer feel, on any level, that they are less important.

Renie Sotiropoulos '90

Why Turf?

I have often been asked what playing sports at Bucknell has meant to me. The answer that comes most immediately to mind is friendship. My most enduring friendships from Bucknell are the ones that were cultivated on the hockey and lacrosse fields. There is something about working together as a team, day in and day out, laughing and crying together, traveling together, striving for the same goals, and feeling the frustration or the elation at having failed or succeeded, that is the stuff of long-lasting friendships. Here, I am reminded of the old adage: friends who run sprints together, stay together. It is in this way that my experiences as an athlete at Bucknell will always be with me.

And yet, there is more. Beyond the enduring friendships are the clear memories of scoring a winning goal, pulling out an overtime victory, or losing the one that was just outside of our reach. Each of these things, and so many more, mark the experience of what it was to play sports at the Division I level at Bucknell. It was, in short, a serious endeavor.

It was a serious endeavor that went beyond the playing field as well. In the game, we learned powerful life lessons that honed our leadership skills, and/or cultivated a sense of determination, focus, and cooperation, that would augment our academic and professional lives to come.

For all these reasons, I am writing to encourage support for the new turf initiative at Bucknell. I played eight seasons of sports at Bucknell, all of them on a grass field. So why might I encourage this new initiative so strongly? My answer is simple: because it is needed for field hockey to continue as a serious, competitive sport at Bucknell. To be sure, it is only within such an atmosphere that I was able to gain everything that I did from my participation in it. However, the sport changes over time, and for incoming students to glean such rewards from the program, Bucknell must be able to change with it.

This past spring, I decided to play lacrosse for the first time in eight years. I must admit, that I returned to a game that was noticeably different from the one I had left so many years before. To my surprise, the game had not been stagnant all those years: the rules had changed, the level of skill had most certainly advanced. It was then that I realized that sports are like a living, breathing thing that develop, change, and progress over time. As a well-organized, international sport, field hockey will also develop, change, and progress over time with or without Bucknell. Indeed, field hockey today is different from what it was in 1994 (when I graduated) and different even more so than what it was in 1974 when women's sports began at Bucknell. Therefore, to pretend that Bucknell's field hockey team could remain as competitive (and as serious) without advancing in the direction that the sport is already going, would be to do the players, the coaches, the program, and Bucknell a great disservice.

The fact that every other team in the Patriot League has turf is a clear indication that Bucknell needs to move with the times, and we need your support to do that. As I have tried to convey in this letter, there is a great deal more to lose than a game or two if the caliber of this team is allowed to stagnate.

Tricia Way '94

Why Turf?

In the fall of 2001, I returned to Bucknell for the field hockey/lacrosse alumni games. I graduated in 1997 and had never played with any members on either team. It was a humbling moment when Annie Richards, the senior lacrosse goalie, stuffed me and blocked my gorgeous shot to the upper left corner of the net. Annie proceeded to gloat about the save when she came out of her goal and ran past me with the ball. After she beat me, for the second time, she was able to successfully clear the ball into her offensive end. For someone who loved being fast and in shape it was a humbling moment. Even now, a year later, I laugh at the memory and at the idea that things have changed, but they haven't changed at Bucknell.

What has changed: the West Fields have lights, bathrooms, a scoreboard, and a banner. Which means that they have replaced the trailer shed, the old baseball scoreboard hidden in the bush, and players no longer run to the golf course to use the port-o-pot before the game. What hasn't changed is not as definitive: Barb Jordan and Heather Lewis are still there; the teams still wear kilts; and the Bison still loath the Engineers.

If you cipher through the above code, you will find there is a sense of commitment, tradition, and competitiveness still pulsing through the field hockey/lacrosse programs. Commitment wise, the lessons that Heather and Barb have been teaching for nearly a decade have grown roots and gives the program a purpose.

I played sports because I wanted to win. As a teacher and coach now at the secondary level, I have seen programs fail from bad coaching and bad facilities. Riding on the wave of gender equity, women's sports has benefited with proper investment in both areas. I feel that the Bucknell field hockey and women's lacrosse programs have the finest coaching staff in their respective fields. Students that I currently teach want to go to Bucknell for the same reasons I did: High academic standards and the opportunity to play Division I athletics in the Patriot League. One aspect holding these programs back from drawing the student-athlete of choice is the fear that Bucknell will trail off in competitiveness. Being the only team in the Patriot League without a turf field makes the other schools more attractive and other programs more promising.

When I was driving back to Washington D.C., after the alumni weekend, I began to reconsider my involvement in the university. The academic education I received at Bucknell is invaluable and has not been overlooked. But, I must support the women's athletic programs at Bucknell. In my day-to-day life, I look to the lessons learned from my coaches and teammates as most valuable. There is something irreplaceable in the experience I had as an athlete.

Katie McIlvain '97

